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*A Manual on
Wood Engraving*

THIS book is not a history of wood engraving, nor is it a book of representative modern wood engravings. It is a simple hand-book teaching primary lessons and guiding the artist by the simplest methods to early success in this craft.



PLATE I.—TWO EXAMPLES OF THOMAS BEWICK'S WORK.

A MANUAL ON WOOD ENGRAVING

By

L. A. DOUST

AUTHOR OF

"A Manual on Pastel Painting"
"A Manual on Watercolour Drawing"
'A Manual on Sketching from Life,' etc.

With Thirty-six Illustrations



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Introduction

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”—Ecclesiastes ix. 10.

AN artist is not he who sees beauty but he who expresses it. Hence the first occupation of an artist is to obtain a control and mastery of his tools. And the continual occupation of an artist is to maintain that control and mastery.

A Manual on Wood Engraving

CHAPTER I

THE OUTLOOK OF THE WOOD ENGRAVER

ALL black-and-white work is decorative. Design or pattern is vital, and each patch or stroke of black or white is not a drawing of something but a suggestion—a simplified indication of an object. In no method of black-and-white work is this more obvious than in wood engraving.

Consider the means by which a wood engraver works: a piece of wood and a piece of sharp steel with which to cut the wood. Here indeed is the art of skilled ingenuity. And, perhaps, because of the simple procedure, there is to be found an astounding individuality in wood engraving.

It is well to realize that the relatively slow motion of the wood engraver's tool when compared with pen, pencil, or brush produces very definite limitations, not only in the work but

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in the choice of subject. If you would make quick life sketches you will prefer paper and pen or pencil; if you desire soft gradations of tone you will use a brush.

There are, unquestionably, certain subjects that call for certain mediums. Have you never said, "This is a watercolour day," or "What a study for pastels"? In my books about these two mediums I very definitely indicate their peculiar adaptability to certain subjects, and, now that we are dealing with wood engraving, the same fact must be acknowledged and considered.

Let me briefly mention the features by which a wood engraving surpasses all other but similar effects in art.

Primarily there is pattern. It is natural and automatic for our eyes to seek the blacks of a black-and-white drawing, for with ink one draws the blacks. But with the graver, one cuts the white leaving the black. Hence in the latter work one has a background of black to start with, from which one takes away, little by little. The artist does not build up the drawing but picks out the drawing. For this reason every line has a deep significance, a tremendous impor-

OUTLOOK OF THE WOOD ENGRAVER

tance, and one is irresistibly impelled to a consideration of pattern and design.

Secondly, there is texture. The amazing variety of strokes possible with the various gravers, nay, even with one graver; the inevitable care and precision necessary when cutting into wood; the possibility of exploiting the opposite effects of black line on white background and white line on black background (of which more later): all these features make the representation of texture an admirable feature of wood engraving. There is, I personally find, little temptation to draw just shading lines such as are so common in pen-drawings. One of the chief reasons, whatever the medium, for such shading is a desire to obtain depth of tone, but in wood engraving the artist does not seek tone—it is already there in the dark surface.

Also there is a much stronger incentive to render the texture of a subject when cutting out the white than when working with black upon a white background, for is not the detail clearer and stronger in the light than in the shade? You will find, when skilled in the use of the graver, that no line instrument can compare with it in

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delicacy and precision, and that the production of various textures is one of the more fascinating sides to this art.

Thirdly, there are contrast and depth of tone. How easily one can obtain rich velvety shadows, brilliant lights, masses of black choicely and delicately broken or spotted with lights, when cutting out the white with a firm steel tool !

There are two great strains upon the beginner in wood engraving. One is the necessary practice of strokes by which to obtain a facile and confident handling of his tools. The other is an associated restraint ; the beginner must not, dare not, on any account, attempt the production of an original design without having had the aforesaid practice. The imposition of this unwelcome delay to his natural desires is, like all necessary restraints, well rewarded by the result, and, I think, indicates the absorbing interest and joyful skill in the working of a successful wood engraving.

In order that the beginner may at once have some creative work I have inserted early in this book on Plate 2, Figs. A and B, specimens of work useful and permissible. These are drawings in white paint on a black background. Such



A



B

PLATE 2.—DRAWING IN WHITE PAINT ON A BLACK BACKGROUND.

Wood Engraving.

A 4.

OUTLOOK OF THE WOOD ENGRAVER

drawings are very suitable as studies or preparations for wood engravings; and there is no reason why the early student should not, when the urge to create becomes strong, prepare such drawings. You will in this way become used to seeing the white or lights of a subject instead of, as in a pen-drawing, the blacks. If in the past you have consistently drawn black or white your eye and your hand will need considerable training in order to see and work upon the white parts, leaving the black. No longer may you simply draw a black outline to objects, nor may you shade in the shadows. Hence I advise practice with white paint as exemplified on Plate 2, and in time, having done the exercises following immediately, you will become accustomed easily and naturally to see the light, for it is the light or white parts that you actually produce.

CHAPTER II

MATERIALS AND PREPARATORY EXERCISES

THE materials necessary to wood engraving are inexpensive. To start work you need but a small block of boxwood and a graver called a spitz-sticker, of medium size, as shown by a drawing at Plate 3, Fig. A. These may be obtained from direct suppliers or through any firm supplying artists' material.

The next thing to grasp is the way to hold the graver. At Plate 3, Fig. B, I give a sketch of the correct hold and also the angle of the graver with the wood when cutting an average line. Note that the finger tips run along the graver, that the ball of the handle rests in the hollow of the palm, and that the tips of thumb and forefinger are close together. Variations of this grip may occur with different people, due to temperament or the shape of the hand, but it is well if the beginner learns to hold his graver in this fashion, then



FIG. A

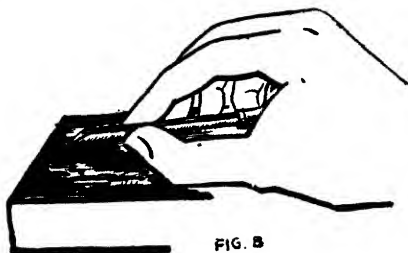


FIG. B

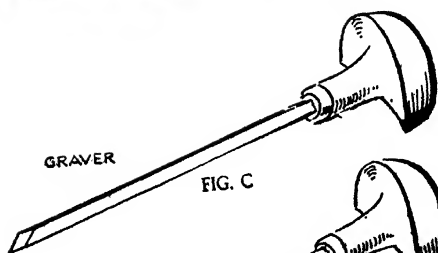


FIG. C

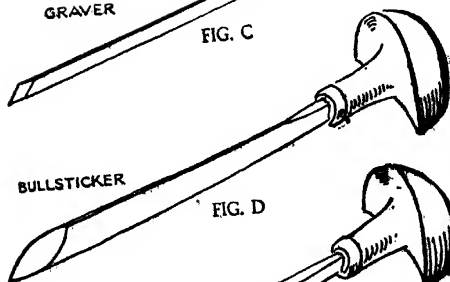


FIG. D

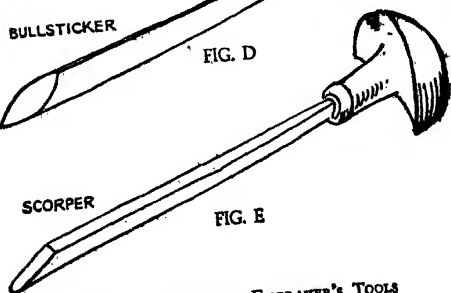


FIG. E

PLATE 3.—THE WOOD ENGRAVER'S TOOLS

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if, when accomplished, he finds a modification more natural and easier, he need not worry. The reason for not allowing the fingers to curl round the tool is the same as for the flattening of the wooden ball on the handle: when working on a large block of wood the rear part of the tool is but slightly above the wood and consequently there is no room for fingers or handle projecting below the steel.

The first operation is to darken the surface of your block of boxwood. Take a piece of superfine sandpaper, reduce the sharpness by rubbing on any piece of smooth clean wood, and then lightly rub over the surface of your boxwood block. This will erase the very high polish found upon prepared boxwood. Now take a spot of printer's ink upon the ball of the finger and rub evenly over the wood to obtain a deep brown colour (nearly black); put aside for three days or so until quite dry. Fine printing ink may be obtained from firms supplying artists' materials or from any good printer. An alternative, less satisfactory, is to coat the wood surface with a thin wash of Indian ink, but, although quick in drying, the result is a harsh surface tending to

MATERIALS & PREPARATORY EXERCISES

flake slightly ; hence for all fine work use printing ink.

Here I suggest, for those to whom economy is a necessity or virtue, that you do not purchase a large block of boxwood for early practice work. Wood engraving boxwood costs about threepence per square inch, but you can generally obtain cheap odd cuttings of various proportions with an area of from two to three square inches.

Now place your prepared wood block upon a pad of cloth as this will allow a very slight "give," facilitating a sensitive touch ; take up your spitz-sticker in the manner described, and you are ready to work.

But I must beg you to restrain your ardour. You have to learn the "feel" of your instrument, to sense the relation between your use of the tool, that is to say, the angle and pressure, and the resulting line.

The first exercise that I ask you to attempt is a sequence of straight lines parallel to one another. On Plate 4, Fig. A, is reproduced such an exercise from which you may know the approximate widths of line to aim at.

Please do not imagine that this is easy or speedily

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performed : there is no better test of craftsmanship for a skilled wood engraver. You will be surprised how difficult is the control of the graver in your inexperienced hand. Do not rule any guide lines for this exercise but work directly upon the darkened block. The straining to maintain a straight line will develop your control although the results may be disheartening. The commonest error is to work too fast ; you will have a strong desire to work speedily ; you will subconsciously try to cut as fast as you draw ; the sharp new graver will slip easily through the wood, but the result will not be accurate and the lesson will be unlearned. The sole purpose of these earliest exercises is to obtain complete control over your instrument.

Make up your mind as to the width of line required and maintain it. Be sure you are cutting a straight line and one of even depth.

There is only one way that I know to achieve even partial success in such a task. Go slowly ! Work, at first, in short strokes, as shown at Plate 4, Fig. A. Do not worry unduly if the result is somewhat uneven where stroke joins stroke, but aim to keep an even strength of line and, above



FIG. A

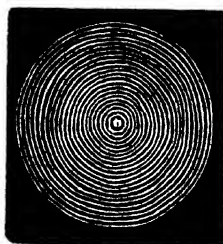


FIG. B



FIG. C



FIG. D

PLATE 4.—FIRST EXERCISES.

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all, a straight line. Be super-careful! Try to make each short stroke about a tenth of an inch long. Don't hurry. Better to have three lines true and straight than thirty lines sadly irregular.

The actual movement in making one short stroke is as follows. Holding the graver at about an angle of thirty degrees, pierce the wood and immediately flatten out your graver to the slight angle shown at Plate 3, Fig. B. Proceed with your stroke, then close it with a sharp but perfectly neat upward "flip." Do not overdo any of this procedure: you will learn your own individual method of varying it as you advance in skill.

Having cut a number of lines without any previous guide or ruling, you will, on examination, find, not only a tendency to curve in one direction, but also many decided irregularities due to uneven pressure or varying angle of tool. You will see such on the examples at Plate 4, Fig. A, which are indeed far from perfect and are more an example of what to do than how to do it. Any irregularities may be corrected by means of exceedingly delicate touches made with the graver leaning over slightly towards the part requiring shaving. Be very

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careful with such minute paring, for—I must venture to emphasize the obvious—you can cut away but cannot put back that which has been cut.

While working on this exercise you probably find your interest centred upon the white lines—those you cut ; but you will be helped very much if you train your mind to “sense” the black lines—those which print. Of course you must keep your main attention on your tool and its path, but the line you leave between your cuts is the line that prints, and a practised wood engraver always has half of his eye upon the black, thereby keeping a double check upon his accuracy. This peculiar feature of wood engraving—of seeing it either as black lines on white or white lines on black—is not only one of its assets as a double check on your work but continues to influence your work however advanced and holds much of the charm of wood engravings, of which I will say more later.

When you have acquired a comfortable and familiar hold of the tool and a control over your strokes by means of such simple straight line work you will be fitted to pass on to the next task

MATERIALS & PREPARATORY EXERCISES

—the curved line. I do not expect you to cut perfect lines when working on these exercises. A perfect line is a rare feature of any wood engraving and is only to be obtained by the confident long stroke of much experience. The short strokes which I advise at this early stage make a smooth line next to impossible, but they will lead you to a confident skill quicker than an attempt at long straight cuts.

On Plate 6, Figs. C, D and E, are a few strokes such as are in the repertoire of an able wood engraver, but at this stage please do not attempt them: keep rigidly to the order of exercises.

To cut a circle is no mean accomplishment. You will, if inexperienced, fail not only to obtain a smooth line of even width but will be unable to keep the perfect circle. On Plate 4 at Fig. B you see the kind of exercise advised. Strike one circle only with a pencil. Cut this carefully and then work in or out from it with parallel rings.

Do not worry or be depressed if you do not succeed in these tasks. Your aim is to become familiar with your graver and wood more than to engrave a perfect line. As I have already said,

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only the most skilful of engravers could accomplish such work well; I myself am very conscious of my inability to give you perfect examples to emulate, but perhaps the imperfections of my efforts will render you less fearful in that they are definitely within your reach, whereas a master's work might by its perfection deprive you of hope.

This block was cut in my early days of wood engraving and will, I think, be of more value to the beginner than a more perfect example. When you have equalled this very amateur effort you may proceed, but be sure you have reached this modest standard in graving circles before you commence more interesting work. The circles of this Fig. B were, as I recall, untouched after the first direct graving, but could have been improved by careful graving.

When engraving this circular exercise you will find that quite naturally you turn the block to assist in obtaining the curved cut. This is quite permissible, but beware, for it is very easy to get an irregular curve if the block is not turned evenly and steadily upon your pad.

There is one other difficulty which, although

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present in the cutting of straight lines, is emphasized in curved ones. When you terminate your short stroke and commence another you will find that it is difficult to gauge the exact width of your previous stroke in which the graver now rests. You must practise steadily until you can "feel" the correct width of line by the amount of pressure employed. I need hardly say that the proper engraved line should need no touching up or deepening, but should be correct in every way in the one stroke. Nevertheless touching up is often not only helpful, but unavoidable. The motto for wood engraving is that for all line drawings. Do all you can with one stroke, then after careful consideration and with super caution and restraint correct where absolutely necessary.

Engrave these circles one by one, completing each in turn; then go over them carefully and delicately, improving where possible, but leaving where doubtful. Make your first aim a good circle and your second a good line.

There are wood engraving tools for the mechanical graving of parallel lines, both straight and round, but I only mention them to explain the

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perfection of stroke found in old engravings (mainly of technical subjects). I do not wish or advise you to interest yourself in them. The true art of wood engraving is a freehand craft with the hazards and risks accompanying all free-hand work.

No doubt you have read so far through this book without stopping to try the exercises and advice as they occur. Therefore I am now going to mention quite briefly some of the difficulties which will face you on your path towards efficiency.

You will have difficulty in maintaining the correct hold of your instrument. Do not let your fingers slip round it, nor the handle slip from its place in the palm. Much of the driving force of your strokes should come from the palm, the fingers' chief duty being guiding and controlling the direction.

Keep your graver erect as far as possible, only using a leaning position when a correction of width is required.

Be sure that the graver does not "run away" from you: always have complete control and the conscious ability to stop instantly when desired. Hence work slowly, not hesitatingly but steadily

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and surely. Speed, if natural, will come after skill and control.

When producing a line by several strokes make very certain to commence each section with the graver firmly set in the cut, and proceed, making quite sure that the graver is held at exactly the same angle and is being propelled at exactly the same speed as when producing the previous stroke.

Keep your wood firm, for a bad stroke may well be caused by a wobbly or carelessly held block.

Keep your graver sharp upon an oilstone. A light prick upon a finger nail will, with practice, enable you to detect a sharp tool.

When gravering fine lines be sure that your graver bites the wood from the start of the stroke.

Upon completion of a stroke tilt the tool sharply from the line, and so you will not only get a clean finish, but will toss the cutting of wood clear of your work.

The next exercises are various and require little comment. On Plate 4, Figs. C and D show but a few of the multitude of strokes possible. The curved lines shown at Fig. C are to be done slowly and little by little, the aim being confidence in

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and control of your tool more than anything else.

The graded lines of Fig. D have many uses and show the qualities of wood engraving very clearly. Each is completed in one steady stroke, the gradation being obtained by a gradual increasing pressure upon the tool. Always work such graded lines from thin to thick.

Please note especially the six strokes at the bottom of this block. The first is a simple graded line; but you will observe that, although the second is similar, it has one added feature—a sharpness to one corner of the wide end. The third stroke has both corners sharpened. The procedure for such a “squaring” is simple: it merely consists of a sharp flick of the tool upwards and outwards from each corner.

The three short strokes show this stroke finishing a wide short line. The line consists of two graded lines over one another and opposite. Then the corners are squared as described and as shown in the last line. These graded lines are a useful introduction to the graving of long lines.

It is comforting and encouraging to know that the exercises presented early in this book



PLATE 5.—AN EXAMPLE IN CONTRAST AND BRILLIANCE.

Wood Engraving.

MATERIALS & PREPARATORY EXERCISES

are more difficult in exact execution than nearly anything that you have to perform when actually at work on a subject. The extreme care and precision required when graving parallel curved lines without previous preparation will train you to control your tool most rapidly and thoroughly.

When you have groaned over these seemingly simple tasks you should turn to the appendix of this book and observe and study the marvellous skill of the eighteenth and nineteenth century wood engravers. There is no artist alive who can engrave with such delicacy and precision as these practised men of the past.

In the introduction to the appendix and elsewhere in this book you will find many serious criticisms of this painstaking work as to its artistry and method; but for sheer craftsmanship—the cunning and brilliant handling of the wood graver—such old work has never been rivalled. When you look at these works and realize that every piece of white was cut out of wood, you will, I hope, appreciate at least the astounding variety of line and delicate work possible in this art.

The method of producing the drawing upon the wood block varies very much. Each artist

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has his own style of drawing and consequently, in this preliminary work where freedom is possible, methods differ. I will not go into the various ways in which drawings may be printed or stamped upon the block, as I do not recommend such a reproduction, although to transfer a finished drawing is possible and at times safer for the student than redrawing.

The main rule to follow is—make a careful drawing. Whether you work on a darkened surface or a half-toned surface or the natural boxwood colour, do not be careless or uncertain. The next rule is—do not work heavily. If you use white paint, do not lay it on thickly. It is advantageous to work low in tone as your engraved lines will stand out more clearly.

You are free, in your drawing, to use any medium. I have on occasion used black-and-white paint, pencil, and ink—all on one drawing. There is no necessity to make your preliminary design appear like a wood engraving, *i.e.*, white lines on black; although it is always well to have this general outlook when preparing for the graver. Hence as a rule it is advisable to tone the block as suggested and directed in this book. Upon

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this darkened surface you must make a careful and complete drawing of your subject upon which you may engrave with confidence and have no other concern but the handling of your tool. Do not forget that your drawing will be reversed when printed from the engraving, hence you must make your drawing the reverse of your desired result.

CHAPTER III

SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

IF you have studied carefully the words and practised patiently the exercises of the preceding chapters you have acquired a degree of skill in the use of the wood graver which justifies a flight into the heights of pictorial composition. Before I venture to suggest any suitable subjects or necessary restraints for your eager hand you will be helped very much by a brief account of the whys and wherefores in modern wood engraving.

Without going back to the history of primitive wood cutting I will draw your attention to the work of the nineteenth century. Books were being printed in continually increasing quantities, and illustrations were required ; the wood engraver was the man to supply them. In the early days of 1810 to 1850 many of the wood engravers were able artists and, drawing their designs upon the wood, cut them cleanly and beautifully, in-

SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

venting strokes for the exigency of each variation of texture. Thomas Bewick, of whose magnificent work two specimens are shown on Plate 1, was in the opinion of many modern artists the greatest of all wood engravers. His lines are clean and bold, eminently suitable for reproduction, carefully retaining the rich tone and fresh clarity to be obtained in this lovely craft. He worked with an ever-changing stroke that caught the textures of his subject in a remarkable manner. His work is delicate but not finicky, bold but not coarse ; it is perfect craftsmanship in containing no unnatural or sensational effects. Another feature of his work is that he concentrated upon the white line. Let me explain this more clearly.

In a pen drawing a black line is drawn : in a wood engraving a white line is cut or engraved. But in wood one can draw upon the block a pen drawing and then, by careful work, engrave between and around the lines drawn until the block will print a replica (reversed of course) of your original line drawing. This entails great pains and much skill, as you will readily appreciate by a study of the works of the wood engravers printed between 1850 and 1900 : such amazing

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skill was attained that only a very practised eye can tell, with some of these drawings, whether they were engraved upon wood or made and printed by modern block making process.

You know of course that in early days there was no method for reproducing line drawings other than having them engraved upon wood. When magazines and books became popular and common owing to improved printing machines, artists were commissioned to illustrate and, in most cases, not being skilled wood engravers, they drew their designs upon the wood with pen or pencil or brush and left the wood engraver to cut them. This resulted in a literal copying of the artist's drawing (particularly in the case of line drawings), and these wood engravers, by such rigid adherence to the lines of the original drawing, became amazingly adept at cutting round and between such lines.

You will understand that, if a certain tone is to be obtained, the line artist draws black lines crossing one another for a cross hatch, but the natural method of a wood engraver is to cut white lines crossing one another. On Plate 6 I give an example of a line drawing (Fig. A) and

SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

of a wood engraving (Fig. B). Observe that the depth of the tone is the same but note especially the difference in effect. It is not a matter of which you prefer but that there is a definite difference—the texture is different; there is more glitter—brilliance—in the wood engraving.

It is written that there is a time for all things : I venture to say that there are subjects peculiarly suitable to every medium. Also I would point out that although the production of Fig. B by means of a pen would be a quite hopeless task, yet the production of Fig. A is well within the scope of a skilled wood engraver.

Wood engraving has its own peculiar charms and limitations. There is a medium for every temperament or nature. You may look at the world through a wood engraver's eyes. All I wish to impress upon you is the difference in "feeling" between line drawing and wood engraving. A pencil, nay, even a watercolour drawing is closer akin to a pen drawing than is a wood engraving; for, in this cunning craft, we reverse the whole outlook from the commencement; obviously then the result, if natural and normal, will be different from others.

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I once heard a pianist complain that a portion of a Beethoven sonata was not pianistic. I asked him what he meant. He said that the construction was orchestral; the fingering necessary was a colossal strain—a fantastic feat of digital acrobatics. Have you ever heard a march tune upon a piano or a sonata movement played by an orchestra? Well, such is the feeling given when a wood engraver copies a pen drawing. No matter how beautiful his engraving, he has lost the peculiar qualities of his craft by working in a method foreign to his instruments.

I do not wish you to get the impression, from Plate 6, Figs. A and B, that the only or proper way to produce tone in wood engraving is by means of a cross-hatch.

Let me digress. I have said that wood engravers of the latter half of the nineteenth century cut around the lines of an artist's drawing. But sometimes the drawing was a tone or wash drawing. Of course, then, the engraver had no lines to follow or cut round, but had to use his own choice of line for the reproduction in wood. On such occasions, I regret to say, the result was often less happy from the artistic view; but it is in such

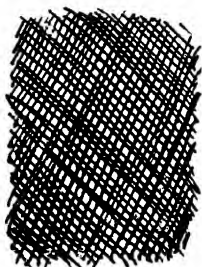


FIG. A

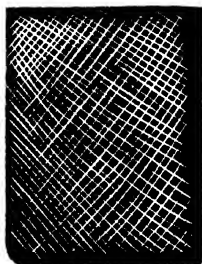


FIG. B



FIG. C

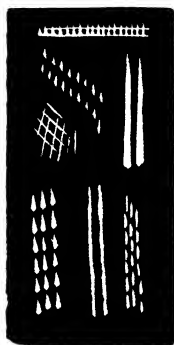


FIG. D

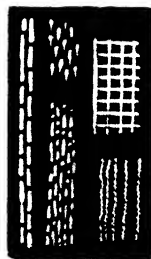


FIG. E

PLATE 6.—CROSS-HATCHING AND SPECIMEN STROKES.

SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

drawings that you will find the most marvellous engraving. You can easily recognize these wood engravings from half-tone drawings by the subdued tones and multitude of long straight lines in the sky and such places where in the original were large masses of flat tone. Nevertheless if you study such work carefully, and there are thousands in the magazines of 1890 and thereabouts, you will see that, when left to themselves, these skilful wood engravers relied but little upon a reproduction of black line cross-hatching and obtained as much of their effect as they could by means of parallel line shading varying in form and direction according to texture or tone.

A considerable quantity of modern wood engraving is lamentably unambitious in the finer qualities of this craft. On Plate 5 I show a print which is a fair example of modern methods. The aim appears to be the very valuable one of contrast and brilliance. These two features are peculiarly essential and attractive in every wood engraving, and, sad to say, it is this contrast and brilliance which is lacking in so much of the nineteenth century work, not because the old engravers used a minimum of cross-hatching, but because

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they were trying to copy work which had been worked in another medium.

Before leaving the example of cross-hatching at Plate 6, Fig. B, I would emphasize its undoubted attraction and utility. As I have said, and I make no apology for repetition of such a fundamental, the wood engraver starts with black and works white. I recall the words, "And darkness was upon the face of the deep." In all due reverence for the context, I venture to say that the wood engraver brings light to darkness. I personally feel that this is the correct way to produce a black-and-white drawing; rather than, as with a pen drawing, to place upon light (white paper) the shadows of darkness.

Also consider, which is the clearer to see in detail, the part of an object in shadow or that part in light? Do you see the texture of an object as clearly in shadow as in light? I grant that a blaze of light will cause a confusion of detail, but it must be admitted that that which we see is light. Hence I claim for wood engraving the perfect principle of black-and-white design.

The word "design" is one that should always be applied to line work, whether pen, pencil,

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brush, or graver. To attempt to reproduce an object or scene by means of lines is patently impossible, therefore the result is an artificial arrangement of lines to represent the object. Any artificial arrangement makes possible that re-adjustment regarding balance which is called design. From this argument I conclude that every wood engraving must have careful design.

From this digression let us return to the consideration of cross-hatching in wood engraving. Turning to Plate 5 you will observe that there is no attempt to represent detailed texture, such as hair, cloth, leaves. The extreme simplicity of outlook and aim in this drawing gives strength, and the elimination of detail accentuates the design. As I have said, wood engraving is eminently suitable for pure design, its pictorial possibilities being limited. With a pen one can freely and rapidly sketch from life; but the graver is not only slower than the pen but has limitations; for example one cannot produce naturally a "scribble" line.

I would direct your attention to the pattern of the cross-hatching in the sky. This black diamond pattern, as I have previously pointed out, has a

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brilliance which cannot be rivalled by the pen, and is remarkably adapted to the showing of light shining upon an object.

Now let me give the procedure when working this block. The staining of the wood surface was, purposely, much paler than I recommended in my earlier directions. You will note that, although I have been emphasizing most strongly the importance of working a wood engraving white on black, yet in this, the first example of actual design, the effect is black on white.

Do not imagine that your outlook changes. You must still work and "feel" the white spaces ; but when, as in much out-of-door work, the problem consists of black objects against white background you will be helped if you rub only sufficient ink upon the block to produce a middle tone, and then with black ink draw on your shapes. Upon such preparation you may well work with a cream tint (white and yellow) the actual spaces to be cut. When using white or cream upon a block do not work too thickly, for your actual engraving lines will be much finer and sharper than those of your pen or brush, and if you have

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clogged up your drawing with heavy lines you will not see clearly what you are cutting. Generally it is well to draw your preparation lines with a rather thin wash, through which your cuts will show up clearly. If you find the slightest difficulty in seeing what you are graving you must rub down your white drawing with dry finger or rag: better to have no preparation lines than to be confused by them.

Having prepared your block, placed it upon the pad and taken your spitz-sticker, cut around your shapes. Now comes the need for another tool. A scorper is a tool for engraving quickly on broad space. The solid white areas in a wood engraving would give considerable trouble if one had to use a pointed graver, but the broad blade of the scorper makes such work simple. There is no need to cut out such spaces deeply, especially if small.

On Plate 3 I show simple drawings of a scorper and other very useful tools. All of these may be obtained in many sizes and each has its peculiar uses. Plate 6 shows three blocks each engraved with a different tool in varying strokes. You should practise copying these blocks with the

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correct tools, remembering that each stroke is a direct graving.

To return to Plate 5, having scorped the masses of white, the cross-hatching must be added. Grave your lines outwards, that is to say, from black to white. Cut neatly and carefully, striving to obtain the exact width in each stroke, but not hesitating to touch up very delicately when desired.

The great difficulty that the student will have to overcome in such work as this plate is that of retaining a simple outlook. I take for granted that my readers are able draftsmen, that they have learned to draw with pencil and brush. You will at once appreciate that the great feature of this block is what has been left out. Also, when you try anything similar, you will realize that extreme care is needed with every cut or the result will be obviously shoddy and crude.

Now I draw your attention to Plate 7, Fig. A. You will be struck by the change of outlook and technique in this block from that on Plate 5.

The old craftsmen of the nineteenth century were consummate masters at the delicate line of varying width; indeed such work calls for a

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continually practised hand and is a supreme test of craftsmanship.

The example at Plate 7, Fig. A, is no attempt to emulate the skill of past work: you have only to turn to the appendix to realize this. Even in these days of pure design, the principle of the line of varying width has definite uses; but my main purpose for including this little study is that you may use it for a study. An exercise such as this is most valuable when finding the control of your tools.

For such delicately toned work a wash drawing is the best preparation. Take the top polish from the wood surface and make your drawing low in tone, so that your engraved lines are clearly visible. If you are uncertain about cutting direct upon the wash drawing, you may sketch faintly, in pencil, a few lines giving main directions and curves to be cut. A certain amount of touching up is unavoidable in such work. When varying the stroke from thick to thin be very careful that your tool does not slip.

The great difficulty in this style of work is to obtain accurate tone values, truly graded. In my example I use a much coarser line than the

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nineteenth century workmen (also, alas, I lack their clean smooth finish—theirs was the result of a life's work), but such coarseness does not matter so long as the gradation from tone to tone is in harmony.

In wood engraving it is the half-tones or middle-tones that require most careful consideration and handling. You will find a natural tendency to cut too lightly, to leave too much black between your lines. Nevertheless this tendency has an advantage, for, as has been said, one can always take away but cannot put back.

Such work as this on Plate 7, Fig. A, is not at all popular among modern engravers who would do anything to get farther from a photographic gradation; but, for certain textures and purposes, it is not only admirable but essential. Also, there is, among some moderns, a definite trend to the grey effect of earlier work, and large solid blacks are, by some, being eliminated or used with much discretion.

That you may appreciate what I mean by modern work with a black emphasis, turn to Plate 7, Fig. B. Personally, I find a peculiar charm in an economy of line both in wood engraving and



FIG. A



FIG. B

PLATE 7.—EXAMPLES OF CONTRASTING TECHNIQUE.

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pen drawing. In this plate we have, not only an economy of line, but a simple yet definite example of the decorative use of a graver. Observe how, instead of an attempt to render a photographic realism, each object is indicated, both in texture and shape, by a particular stroke treated in a decorative manner. The fine lines of clouds and trees curve into one another with a reckless indifference to detail but with all the effect of a representation of stormy sombreness. The sweeping cloak is, one might say, all sweep and no cloak, yet there is an indication of woven material in the cross-hatching (this is emphasized by limiting cross-hatching to this object). Heed well the importance of design in this drawing: this it is that makes it a little picture and not a mere study.

Before leaving this simple work I must ask you to realize that there are but four line styles: the cross-hatch of the cloak, the graded lines of the grass, the short strokes of the bushes, and the thin curved lines of the trees and clouds. If the same stroke had been used throughout, the result would have been crude in its monotony. Also notice the importance of the profile and, hence, the necessity for sound drawing.

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When there is an economy of line each white stroke shows very clearly and consequently must be clean, accurate, and assured. Although there is not a fraction of the technical difficulties of the old style of wood engraving in such modern work as Plate 7, Fig. B, yet there are more artistic problems and pitfalls. The old craftsmen puzzled how to cut a certain texture—with what stroke in what direction—that it might look true to life; the modern artist concerns himself with three aims: one, what to put in and to leave out; two, what kind of strokes will suggest the textures; three, design.

The problem of what and what not to put in is undoubtedly a vital question for the wood engraver. To an extent, of course, it arises in all art, for no one, even with infinite time and infinite capacity, can represent an object with all its variety of detail in colour and form. Indeed such an attempt would not be art. Even in such a comprehensive medium as oil painting one can only suggest an object. It is the purpose of the artist to use a subject to express an emotion or a feeling, and the simpler the means the more emphatic the effect. One of the simplest illustra-

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tions of this fact is a silhouette. How often is a silhouette drawing, photograph, or wood engraving appraised as being powerful in appeal by even the uneducated in art! And, let us never forget, we artists work for the world, the common people, and not for our "artistocratic" selves. I have continually observed that the supreme masterpieces of all art are acclaimed by all.

From the foregoing remarks I suggest that, when designing a wood engraving, you pay special heed to economy of line and simplicity of form. Omit everything that does not aid and abet your aim. A lavish and reckless display of detail or tone is as objectionable as that of wealth. Yet I would not have you mean and parsimonious as are some moderns, using a bare thin line, or a monotonous similarity of stroke. Think well about every stroke of your tool, let it express perfectly, if possible, the texture and form and light required. Be cautious of the amount of strokes, but be audacious in their presentment and prodigal in forethought.

The second aim of the wood engraver has crept into my thoughts on the first, but deserves a paragraph to itself. What kind of stroke shall

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be used? This is peculiarly a wood engraver's problem. I grant that such a consideration is necessary when drawing with pen, brush, or pencil, but of all the instruments to give variety of stroke the wood engraver's are pre-eminent. Turn to Thomas Bewick's engraving of a starling on the frontispiece of this book. Search carefully among the cuts and make a note of their variety, heed how apt is each for its purpose, and note how much the complete pictorial effect depends upon the variety of stroke. Much more will be said on this point as we analyse the examples reproduced on later plates.

Thirdly, design. There is little to add on this vital feature of wood engraving beyond what has been said and what may better be explained when discussing the plates.

CHAPTER IV

PRELIMINARIES AND PRINTING

THE plates now to be discussed have, as indeed have all the reproductions in this book, been printed from blocks specially drawn. My intention was to produce a series of wood engravings with a progressive lesson.

Unavoidably there is less variation in these plates than would be the case if each was by a different artist; nevertheless you may benefit by an analysis of work from the same mind, for you will not be confused by a difference in outlook and may concentrate on how one artist may vary his work to his subject or, rather, to his feeling about a subject. Also, as I have intimated, you will observe an evolution of style.

Before reference is made to the examples before us, it will be well to mention and in some cases to repeat certain preliminaries to the actual engraving.

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Remember that your preliminary lay-out or design on paper will need to be reversed on the block.

Remember to treat the surface of your block with care ; let no scratch mar its surface.

Be sure your tools are sharp.

Take pains with your preliminary drawing on paper as a clear understanding of your intended forms and design is essential to success.

Now let me, once again, explain my favourite method of drawing upon the block. A little printer's ink is rubbed on the wood until the surface is a middle tone—medium brown. Then the main features are sketched in with Indian ink. The lights are drawn in with a creamy yellow. Finally, with a pencil, I add certain detail. I then engrave as much as may be with certainty, finishing carefully as far as possible. Frequently I complete the work at this stage, but if, by reason of faulty drawing or an inability to see the finished effect due to the cream paint or brown surface obscuring the engraved lines, I feel in any way uncertain of the effect, then I run my inked roller over the block and, when dry, complete where necessary.

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Having mentioned the roller, I had better explain the simple but delicate process of printing from a block by hand.

The materials are as follows. A gelatine or compo roller—this may be obtained through any large dealer in artistic material: the best are about six inches long and cost about seven-and-sixpence; they resemble a printer's roller but are much lighter and smaller. A burnisher: these cost two-and-sixpence each, but may be dispensed with if you can find a smooth, hard, slightly rounded object, not too large, and handy in manipulation. I know one of the foremost wood engravers of to-day (to whom I owe nearly all my tuition in this art) who uses the base of a toothbrush handle as a burnisher. But, mark you, it is a handle of just the right shape, one of those long tapering flattened shapes. I myself have a certain small spoon handle which has served well as a burnisher. Again, mark you, it is not every spoon that would serve. Notwithstanding such alternatives I advise every student to buy a burnisher and, having acquired skill in its handling, to experiment afterwards.

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Next comes ink. You may buy this in small tubes at a low price. Or you may obtain a first-class half-tone ink from a printer.

Finally, paper. There is only one kind of paper to be used for printing wood engravings by hand, and it is called Japanese Art. There is a considerable range of Japanese Art papers, hence there is room for interesting experiments. These papers are made only by a few firms, but any dealers or printers will obtain samples or quantities for you. It is not cheap; but, thanks to the average wood engraving being small, it goes a long way if not wasted by careless or inefficient usage.

When one has the above materials, the procedure for hand printing is simple but tricky. Squeeze or place a little ink (about as much as would pile on a sixpence) upon a small sheet of clean glass. Take the roller and roll over the ink until an even surface covers the roller. Now hold the block firmly upon a firm surface and lightly and smoothly run the roller across your engraving. You may do this three or four times in different directions, if you wish to make certain of an even covering of ink. As to whether you roll on too

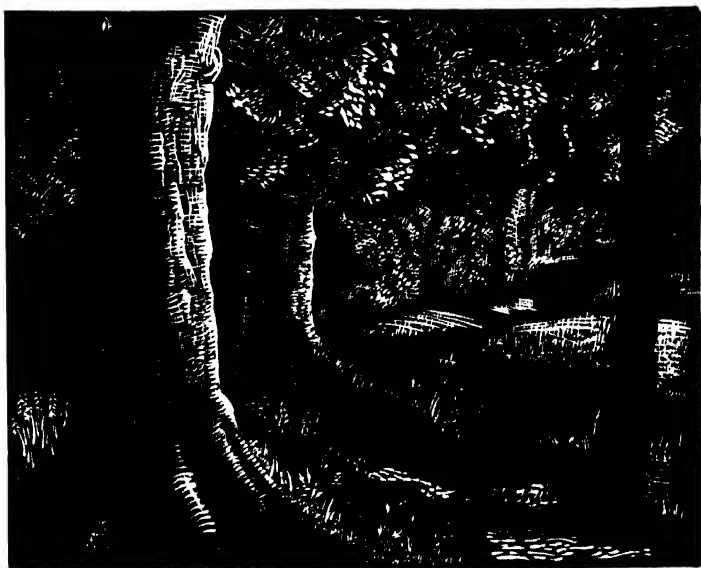


PLATE 8.—A WOODLAND SCENE

PRELIMINARIES AND PRINTING

much ink or too little, I cannot help you : experience must be your teacher in this matter.

Now lay your piece of paper upon the engraving and rub lightly all over the surface with the burnisher. Of course I have no need to tell you that, if the paper slips or moves, the result is a blurred and useless print. Continue to use the burnisher with a circular motion and increasing the pressure gradually. You will see the engraving quite clearly through the thin porous paper and may thereby judge the evenness of your rubbing. When an even greyness is showing over all the inked parts of your block you may lift the paper, neatly and without hesitation, beginning at a corner.

The result is one of three. Ink too light, resulting in a lack of depth and a spottiness in the solids and a general greyness. Ink too heavy, resulting in a filling up of delicate lines and a slight blurring of all edges. Ink just enough, resulting in a rich deep black reproduction of your engraving, such as could never be obtained by the flashing printing machine.

Of all the difficulties facing a wood engraver, the printing is the one I can help or advise upon

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the least. Experience alone will lead you to the right paper for the right subject, the right quantity of ink, the right amount of burnishing, and the right pressure. There is no more thrilling moment in a wood engraver's work than the one when with steady hands and fast-beating heart he lifts the first print from a new engraving. To me the difficulty of printing is but sauce added to the meat.

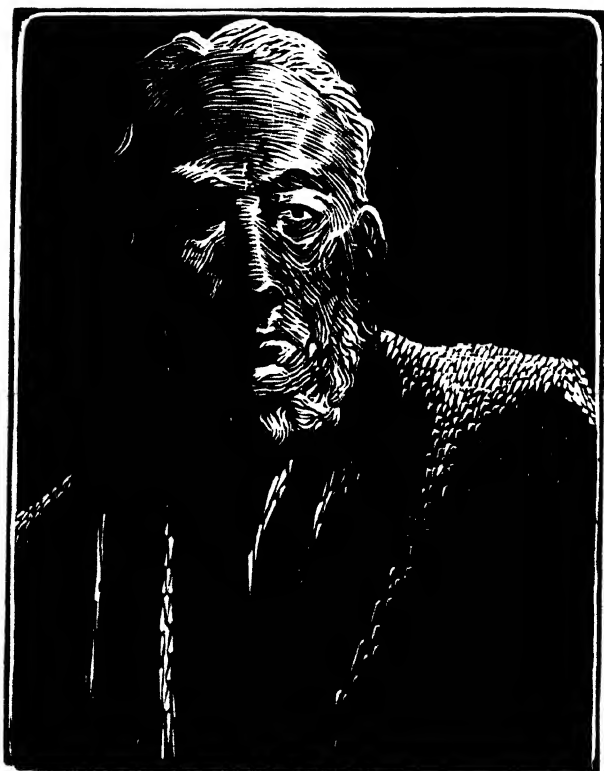


PLATE 9.—A PORTRAIT STUDY.

CHAPTER V

DETAILS OF EXECUTION AND DESIGN

THE sample of work on Plate 8 appears at first glance a complicated and difficult subject for a beginner. Actually it is not at all difficult or complicated if careful and efficient preparation is made. This engraving was taken from a portion of a watercolour drawing which had been drawn with care and with considerable attention to detail.

You will notice the absence of large black masses, especially in the distance: the all-over working gives a feeling of diffused light admirably expressing sunlight filtering through foliage. Observe that the strongest contrast in tone is in the foreground, thus giving distance or depth to the view.

The foliage is cut with a line chosen to suggest rather than to portray leaves. The cross-hatching used in the distance gives a feeling of light broken.

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Here is one of the many virtues of wood engraving. Not with a pen and ink cross-hatching would you get such an effect of light.

The treatment of the bark on the large trunk in the foreground is worthy of study and may well serve as an exercise to the beginner. Note well the discreet use of fine accurately curved lines on the shaded side of this tree. Also heed the long lines on the ground in middle distance ; they suggest the undulation with a simple but effective clarity. The stippled effect at the base of foreground tree gives a pleasant mossy effect.

Although there are few lines of any length in this work there are a large number of varying cuts, and each is chosen with thought. Be sure you know, not only what you are going to engrave but exactly how you intend to engrave it. Spend three times as long thinking as working, and you will spend less time regretting.

I now wish to turn your attention to the portrait study on Plate 9 and would have you compare it with the woodland scene just discussed. Here indeed is a change of style. In the landscape there is a multitude of slightly varying strokes ; in the portrait there are but two types of line,

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both very definite in method and strongly contrasting in feeling.

This head study was also taken from a water-colour drawing. For some reason, difficult to express, I find a good watercolour drawing the most favourable preparation for wood engraving.

Please notice, first of all, how pleasant and powerful is the use of the two types of line chosen ; the short stabbing stroke, which decoratively represents the rough jacket, throws up into vivid prominence the silky effect of the long lines of the face. Skin and bone are suggested clearly and strongly. Place your hand or, better, a piece of paper over the jacket and look again at the head. You will be surprised how much brilliance has gone. Look at your own hand against the cloth of your coat sleeve. Do you see the terrific contrast of texture ? This was my problem—skin and bone ; for the old face had lost much flesh. Without colour, without form, how was I to obtain the drooping skin over bone ? My answer was the contrast of line.

There are one or two other interesting points to make about this engraving. Observe the careful direction of line upon the face. Observe

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the sharp lights on both face and coat, clearly indicating a strong light and thereby justifying the solid black background. It is a sound rule never to have a figure in a soft light against a black background; the effect is unnatural and dull. Strangely but truly, a softly lighted figure looks more brilliant against a soft or toned background. Perhaps this is the reason why so many wood engravings are of strongly lighted subjects, thus permitting of deep black shadows so suitable to the process.

This head was engraved throughout with the graver called a spitz-sticker, illustrated on Plate 3, but the short full cuts on the high lights of the jacket were obtained by the broader bull-sticker, also shown on Plate 3. Fig. C on Plate 3 shows a simple diamond-shaped graver, very useful for fine work and also for sharp-edged spots. It was with such a tool as this Fig. C that the old artists graved the diamond spaces to represent line cross-hatching. I remind you that each of these tools, as the spitz-sticker, is made in many sizes, those on Plate 3 representing medium sizes.

To return to Plate 9. One very useful feature of wood engraving is plainly demonstrated, that

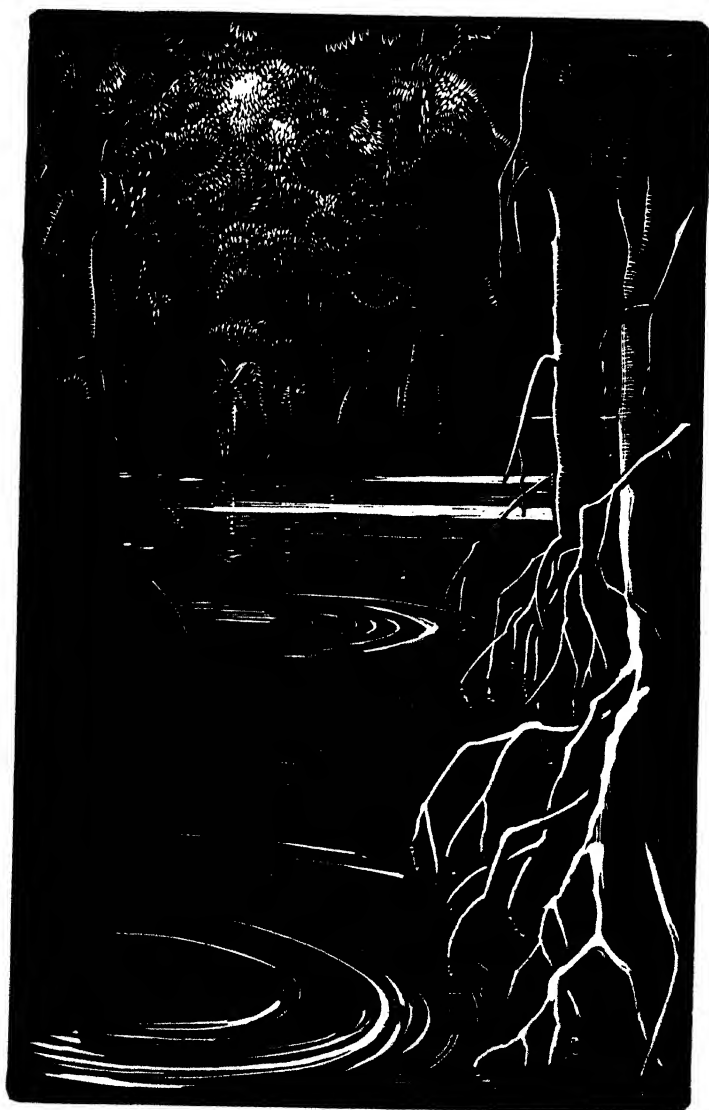


PLATE 10.—A SOUTH AMERICAN RIVER SCENE.

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of running lines into one another. The high lights on forehead and elsewhere are caused by an increasing width in stroke until all separation is eliminated. This procedure to obtain a high light is frequently better than cross-cutting or using separate lines for the high lights.

We now come to a very different subject. One peculiarity of Plate 10 is the perfect suitability of the subject to the medium. Plate 8 might well have been a wash drawing, Plate 9 might have been satisfactory as a pen drawing, but this Plate 10 suggests no probability of equal success in another medium. The damp weird darkness of this South American forest and river seems to me to shout for the wood engraver. Not only do the sharp clean fine lines from the graving suggest well the swirling water and the straggling roots, but there is no other instrument that can give the effect of rich and varied foliage as can the graver.

Look carefully at the distant trees, and compare them with those of Plate 8. The fanciful growths of the Amazonian jungle called for a more decorative treatment than those of the English wood. Each stroke of the graver is more a decorative

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suggestion, the aim being an impression of hazy sunlight through a mass of various equatorial trees and vegetation. Nothing in this block is an attempt to draw an object: everything is an attempt to obtain a feeling—an effect.

It was Joseph Conrad's story "Heart of Darkness" that gave me the "feeling" for this engraving. Then I had to find facts, such as the type of trees, etc. I found an old engraving of the Amazon upper courses which led me to change Conrad's Africa for South America. I drew everything upon the block in considerable detail, first in black, then in white where helpful. I sketched in pencil; I used a wash of grey. Finally I started engraving, but ignored the naturalness of my careful drawing and with considerable care made every stroke but a symbol of the drawing. Hence you see artificial arcs of various strokes in place of detailed clumps of leaves and trunks. In many parts I have ignored all my drawing and left a vague blackness.

The method employed in this engraving is far advanced from that in Plate 8. When wood engraving was but a craft, however excellent, its uses were a detailed and literal portrayal of



PLATE II.—HOUSE AND MOTOR-CAR.

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detail. But, now that the artist has very sensibly seized the graver, he must produce something better than the photograph, something which will take his public straight into an emotion. I have seen a wood engraving which by a wonderful cunning in design and style thrust one into a sense of merriment. Even now I cannot recall the details of its subject, but I, in remembering, feel again the hilarity of that work. Great indeed is a work that can surround one with humour; not an illustration to a funny story, but humour in its every line and space—a “funny” design. My little effort here on Plate 10 to represent the spirit of “Heart of Darkness” was made easy by its choice of subject.

One word before leaving this point. Some artists are so conscious of the virtue in expressing an emotion that by extreme simplification or exaggeration they distort the subject employed until it is not to be recognized. I do not like this. If you use a certain subject to express a certain emotion, then it should be of such a nature as to help the mind to grasp more readily the “feeling,” and, therefore, should be well drawn and easily recognizable. Simplify, certainly. Use

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decorative treatment by all means, especially with such a medium as wood engraving which is by nature decorative. But never lose drawing, never neglect the subject in the attempt to advance the feeling. There are limits of decoration beyond which the true artist will not tread, unless he abandons a subject entirely and resorts to abstract form.

This wood engraving, Plate 10, has some very finely cut lines and consequently has a comparatively short life ; that is to say, it will not wear so well as one of stronger strokes. Nevertheless the wonderful and not-to-be-rivalled delicate lines possible to the wood engraver are not to be ignored. Personally, I have no great respect for lino-cuts on account of the coarseness of line necessary to them : there is, to me, a sensation of commercialism, with all its exaggeration and rawness, in the lino-cut and in such wood-cuts as ignore the subtle qualities of the keen-edged graver upon the hard boxwood. Yet our next Plate, No. 11, shows a very simple strong style, pleasing to the common mind and favoured by many modern wood engravers.

Although Plate 10 is the more difficult subject

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in subtlety of tone values and in the obtaining of an emotion or feeling, yet there is a greater variety of strokes in Plate 11. Each texture has its own stroke. For example, compare the fine lines of the porch sides with the somewhat similar, yet very different strokes of the car. Note the white on black lines of the brick wall and the black on white lines of the shed wall behind. Note the few crisp strokes of the hedge and curved cross-hatching of distant trees. And, with all this variation, the effect is surprisingly simple.

The success of such a subject depends upon a sound preparation. I drew a pen-and-ink sketch upon the block, engraved as far as possible, *i.e.*, until I was uncertain of the final result. Then I ran the inked roller over the surface ; this brought out clearly exactly what I had cut and, hence, what I had yet to cut. Such a style as this is eminently suitable to commercial work and will print well, even upon news paper.

The main objection I have to this Plate 11 is that it looks ordinary, uninspired. But I have included it as a useful type for the student and not as a specimen of my wood engraving. Its style is safe and popular, and there are some born

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to be safe and popular. May this book be a guide to all towards their natural goal.

Wood engraving, as has been intimated and implied, is primarily a method of book illustration. Now there are two kinds of book illustration, which may be defined as the natural and decorative. The natural method is to take an incident from the text and to picture it. The decorative method is by no means so simple. First, one should consider the type face in which the text is printed; secondly, the feeling of the whole book (whether mystic, humorous, dramatic, etc.); thirdly, one seeks to construct each drawing as a design harmonizing in style and form with the first two. Modern wood engraving is serving a valuable purpose in encouraging the return to book decoration. It must be clear to any artist that the really well-written book requires no illustration. "Pickwick Papers" is not less a work of art when printed with no illustrations. But the work of the illustrator is or should be a kind of frame, or, one might say, a cream to the cake.

On turning to Plate 12 you will appreciate something of what I mean. This is no bare

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illustration of an incident. Obviously the incident suggests a story; the palms and reeds suggest Egypt; the figures in shadow suggest times of black magic and cultured savagery. Indeed the whole work is a mass of suggestions rather than portrayals. This is emphasized by the treatment, in which only essential lines are drawn and great attention has been paid to simple effect in design. Observe especially the interesting and decorative effect of the edge. This engraving is not vignetted or faded around the edge; in fact the effect is rather the reverse. In an ordinary naturalistic drawing and even in a vignette the resulting effect is one of a continuation hidden. What I mean is that the effect is one of a small section of an unlimited picture; one feels that the picture could be added to, that it is but a section (well composed, maybe) of a scene.

Now in Plate 12 and such works the effect is one of completion. One feels no interest in the rest of the scene not shown; it just does not seem to exist. This effect gives a great power to the incident, a feeling that here is an incident which, when it happened, was the most important

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in the world. Here is no fading and no finishing to an edge, yet there is a feeling of both.

This style is, to me, ideal for book illustration, and, I am happy to say to you who are potential or accomplished wood engravers, here is a style peculiarly suitable for the graver. Why? Because the cutting away of the edge gives this effect more easily and more perfectly than could be obtained by a working towards the edge by pen or brush.

Here are a few features to notice studiously in this engraving. Observe the varying methods of suggesting palm leaves ; sometimes in silhouette, sometimes with leaf completely white, sometimes with a delicate lining. Each of these methods serves a useful purpose in suggesting strong light and deep shadow. The same principle is applied in cutting the figures, the two in strong sunlight being worked boldly and simply and those in shadow having fine lines and delicate outlines. The general effect is of a hard fierce sun, foreign to our soft western climate.

The next example on Plate 13 brings us from the past to the present, from the east to the west, from savage culture to modern civilization. The



PLATE 12.—A DECORATIVE ILLUSTRATION.

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most instructive feature of this plate is the use of both black line and white line. This subject could be drawn successfully with pen and ink, but in that case one would naturally have less shadow. I emphasize the striking fact that, although there are more solid blacks in such a wood engraving than in a pen drawing, yet it is in the wood engraving that the white patches show up the stronger. This is chiefly due to the artist working upon the white.

This subject is also interesting in showing a peculiarly modern feature—that of diffused lighting: there is no direct lighting effect upon the heads or around the figures. Shadows are seized upon, as you have seen in my previous examples, by the wood engraver, on account of their facile accomplishment and value in design. Here, on Plate 13, I have much shade but little shadow.

There is but little variety of stroke, all interest being centred upon the sad solemn faces of these dancers. The free stroke used to represent the dance band is purposeful, for I aimed thereby to obtain a sense of motion and vibration.

Here I have not broken the edge as in Plate 12, for the impression is of a corner of a large assembly ;

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there is no actual incident portrayed; this is not an illustration of two characters at a dance, but of the character of a modern dance.

Great care has to be taken with the faces and hands. Also in such a subject where no great variety of strokes is used keenest attention must be given to their direction, strength, and quality. The sensation of movement, which is a chief *motif* in such a subject, is enhanced by the zig-zag lines of the mural figures.

Interior subjects are always very easy to manage on the block, partly because the tones are naturally heavier and partly because artificial lighting or window lighting is always more direct and less diffused than the sunlight in landscape, but, as I have said, on this plate we have the representation of modern diffused light. If wood engraving has a future, or, indeed, a present, it must be adaptable to modern features and outlook. The painter of to-day no longer hunts the countryside for old world castle and cottage but finds inspiration in blocks of flats and concrete buildings. Therefore I do not show you an interior candle-lighted nor even with the ever-present sunshine streaming in the window, but, that you may not think that

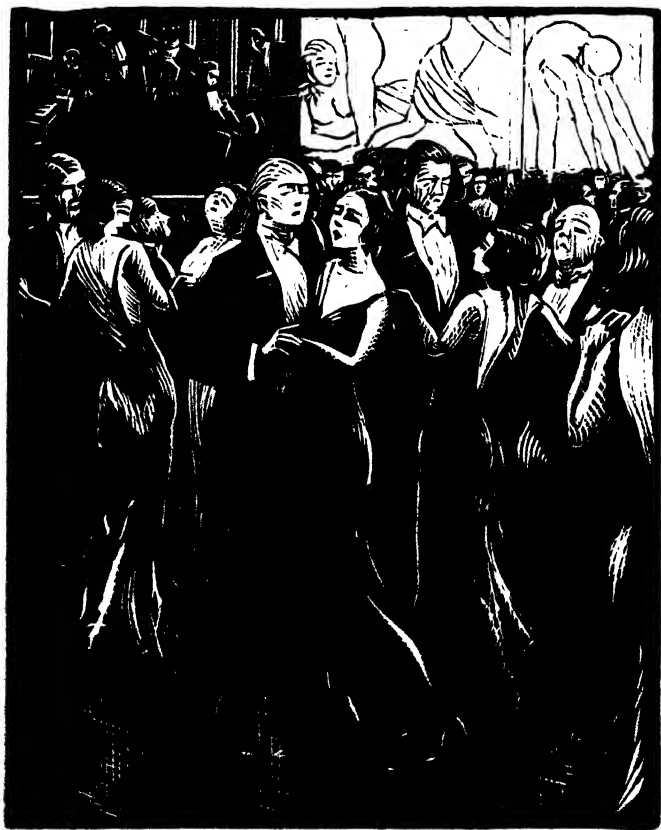


PLATE 13.—AN EXAMPLE OF MODERNITY.

DETAILS OF EXECUTION AND DESIGN

all modernity is without art and lacks the pictorial possibilities of bygone days, I especially chose a feature of to-day's life—a dance hall or ballroom where everyone goes on dancing because it is so smooth and effortless, and where a spirit of lawlessness pervades jogging band and unco-ordinated dancers—each pair alone amidst the others.

We have now reached the end of the tutorial examples. Before passing to the appendix I will briefly go over the vital points in this craft.

Be sure you get a good and smooth piece of wood.

Make your drawing in reverse to your desired arrangement, and design it with much thought.

Take care, great care, with your drawing. Work lightly but accurately, and, if white or cream is used, keep your tones low so that, when cutting, you may see clearly and exactly the strokes of your graver.

Think carefully before each stroke, that it may be clean, fresh, accurate in placing, and expressive in style and form.

Cut the strong whites first, as a general rule. When graving lines upon the edge of a black

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surface, work from black to white, that is to say, outwards. Always try to complete a stroke in length and breadth in one stroke ; but do not hesitate to pare carefully in order to improve a stroke. Work, if anything, a little finer or lighter than your first thought, for you can always enlarge a stroke but never reduce it.

Above all take a pride and joy in your tools. Keep them sharp and even. Remember always what beautiful, clean, and varied lines they can produce and never debase them by shoddy scratching, haphazard cross-hatching, or unconsidered direction and width.

Never let your appreciation of design, or interest in character, action, or atmosphere control you at the expense of good craftsmanship. Do not tack on this noble craft to your art, but build up your art upon a sure foundation of sound and cunning workmanship.

Now, with the previous sentence in your mind, read on concerning, not masters of art, but masters of craft indeed.

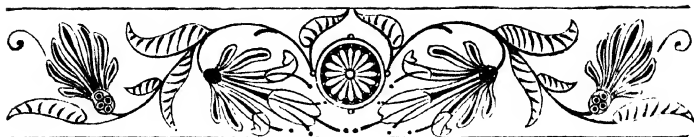


FIG. A



FIG. B

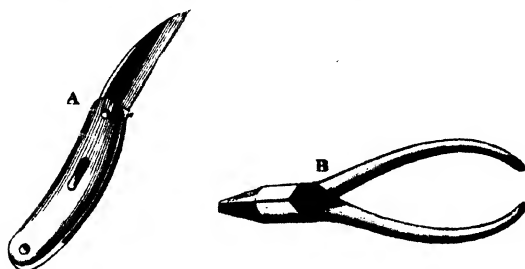


FIG. C



FIG. D

PLATE 14.—EXAMPLES OF FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP.

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NEVER again will the wood engraver have to copy pen or wash drawings for reproduction. Hard indeed is it to find, in these days of photo-reproduction of drawings, the wood engraver bending over his block with light diffusing through the large globe of cool tinted liquid whereby he reduced the glare and preserved his eyesight for his cunning and delicate craft. Art schools have, in the past few years, taken up wood engraving with considerable gusto, but I have a suspicion that in some there is not enough attention and respect given to the old masters of this craft.

Happy indeed am I that wood engraving has revived without the shackles of olden times, the rigid adherence to natural representation, and the unfair compulsion of reproducing a subject in imitation of another medium; but all sincere work has its values. As I have already pointed

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out, the amazing skill of these old craftsmen is unrivalled and never to be obtained without the life work and continual practice which was its soil.

You, who are free to make of wood engraving what you will, who are not bound to the wage-earning block, must be careful not to convert liberty into licence. Too often in modern work one sees a freedom of stroke which is obviously the result of carelessness or sheer inability : cross-hatching which resembles effortless scratching with no attention to clean line. With pen and ink I will tolerate a very sketchy style, but with a wood graver, with its firm, comparatively slow stroke there is no place for heedless lines of uncertain strength and undetermined direction. If you cross-hatch, let it be good clean cross-hatching ; make up your mind as to the exact direction of each line, however fine. Of all faults in wood engraving, carelessness or uncertainty is the least excusable.

In the following few specimens of the old craft you will see much that appears unnecessary, much that looks like pen drawing, much that seems uncalled for in these days of half-tone plates ;

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but I ask you to cast upon one side a criticism of these works as art and to study them as craft.

Is it really possible that the engraver cut so perfectly those tiny spots of such varying shape, all so accurate, so clean and firm? I confess myself amazed and humbled before such work. Try to copy a corner of one of these blocks, and you will, before a dozen strokes, find that you have hopelessly lost their fineness and precision.

One of the most useful purposes of these blocks is a study of how the engraver worked and with what type of stroke. Much may be learned and your repertoire of strokes increased considerably by such an examination.

PLATE I (*Frontispiece*)

Thomas Bewick, as I have said, was the father of English wood engraving; and a very worthy father indeed. The two Bewick illustrations given on Plate 1 are separated widely from the specimens of old work given in this Appendix. This is well, for there is a very definite distinction of

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style between the father of 1840 and the children of 1890. Thomas Bewick designed and engraved his works, but the men of the late nineteenth century engraved upon artists' work. For this reason Bewick's engraving is purer in style and technique ; every line (white line) is a natural process for the engraver's tool.

Although Bewick did not favour solid blacks but achieved a general greyness of tone, yet no one familiar with wood engraving could confuse his work with pen drawing.

Apart from the amazing variety of line and consequent truth in texture, the most admirable quality of Thomas Bewick's work is his representation of form and depth without resort to exaggeration of tone. Observe the full roundness of bird and stone. Observe the distant trees in both examples, how surely they stand back in their true position notwithstanding their simple rendering. Observe the perspective of the running stream.

I most strongly recommend serious students to essay a copy of one or both of these gems of wood engraving. The line is bold enough to follow easily, but your failure to make a true



FIG. A

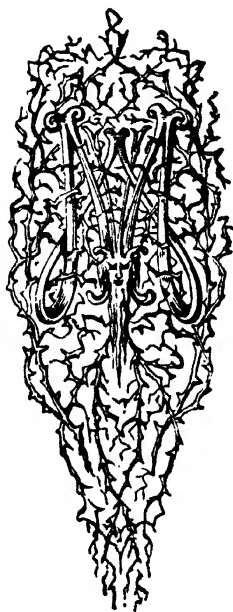


FIG. B

PLATE 15.—EXAMPLES OF "BLACK LINE" ENGRAVING

APPENDIX

copy, and I prophesy failure with assurance, will teach you more than twenty attempts to make an original picture. To make a true copy you must reverse your drawing on the block; but, if you feel this to be too difficult, copy direct, for it is but an exercise by which to learn.

Whenever you see good modern wood engraving turn to these two specimens and counteract any hasty desire to over-admire brilliance by a humble attention to sheer ability, unpretentious in its pains-taking but of lasting satisfaction to the artist of every age.

PLATE 14

Not only to those who have commenced wood engraving I commend this plate, but also to the experienced artist in this craft. The longer your experience of graving in wood, the more you will envy the marvellous skill of men of past days.

The simple border, Fig. A, is simple only in design and would strain the ability of many modern famous wood engravers.

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As to Fig. B, I do not believe there is one alive that could successfully copy this delicate pattern. Look at the curves; how regular and fine! Remember, dear students, that the white was cut out leaving all these tiny lines.

Fig. C is a mundane subject. No longer does the catalogue maker call for wood engravers. But study the clean parallel lines. Not a false stroke, not a clumsy or uncertain one.

As to the semi-decorative floral design of Fig. D, I stand amazed at the brilliant craftsmanship. These common workmen toiled many hours a day and by sheer practice acquired the skill shown here. If you are not quite overwhelmed with these specimens of craft, just spend an hour or more trying to copy a portion.

And is this skill not needed now? I grant that we no longer do this kind of work; but to have such ability would equip one for artistic designs of highest value. Respect for and control of his tool are the artist's first need.



PLATE 16.—A DALZIEL ENGRAVING FROM A DRAWING BY JOHN GILBERT.

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PLATE 15

Here are two excellent examples of good "black line" engraving. You may say that the obvious medium for such work is the pen. True, now that we have a process for reproduction. I do not present this as a style of work but as a specimen of skilful engraving. I personally am humbled at such delightful graving. Do not neglect to practise such "black line" effects, for they have valuable uses in conjunction with "white line" principles.

The initial letter, Fig. B, is a really amazing piece of work. I would suggest that you essayed a copy, but dare not. All I hope is that you will realize the possibilities of your tools and appreciate the opportunities, not only for design and feeling and tone, but also for pure draughtsmanship. Wood engraving is pre-eminently draughtsmanship.

PLATE 16

If the average artist was asked to tell the medium of this plate, he would be excused if he acclaimed

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it as an excellent pen drawing. As a fact, it was, in the original, a pencil drawing upon a block of boxwood. Then came the humble wood engraver and, cutting between and around each line of the artist's, produced this print.

Look well at the variety of strokes the wood engraver had to use. How truly he maintained his half tones! Especially study the figure. Not a false line in face or hand or hair. Delicate, sure, and sensitive, the wood engraver translated the artist's lines to ridges of wood.

I maintain the result is in some ways much better than a reproduction from a pen drawing. The lines are cleaner and sharper, the tones are more subtle. Never will a pen's loose course over paper rival the cut of keen steel into close-grained wood.

Reproduce a pen drawing in facsimile, it is coarse; reduce it, and you lose the open lines and freedom of the original. In wood engraving alone have we the tools fit for a facsimile reproduction. So sharp in edge is every line that, with good printing, the finest spot is clean and fresh.



PLATE 17.—A DALZIEL ENGRAVING FROM A DRAWING BY BIRKET FOSTER.

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Here again is a work of skill. See to it that your works of art are also works of skill.

PLATE 17

Birket Foster is a name much loved in England. He drew with care—laborious care at times—its lanes and woods and hills and valleys. He drew on blocks of wood, wonderful drawings. The wood engraver copied line by line. It is hard to realize that every white patch and spot of this block was engraved. There are three main lessons to learn from this plate.

First, that two of the essential qualities of a wood engraver are patience and care.

Secondly, that of all mediums for cunning tone in black and white, wood engraving is supreme.

Thirdly, that all good wood engraving need not consist of bold strokes and heavy patches.

There is no instrument in the world of art better capable of the finest work than a wood graver. Hence take advantage of this opportunity. Do not neglect the strong rich line and

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space, but also do not neglect the delightfully delicate, yet clean line possible in this craft.

Here I leave you to go back to your modern outlook with, I trust, a new desire, not merely to engrave pictures but to strive for a mastery of your tools, and thereby become a worthy successor to the cunning craftsmen of years ago.

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